

XXVI

Express Stamps and Services

<i>Inauguration and Function</i>	477	<i>Postmarks</i>	487
<i>Stamps</i>	479	<i>References</i>	489
<i>Express Mail Service (EMS)</i>	487		

Inauguration and Function

Only a minority of the countries of the Universal Postal Union have issued specific stamps for Express or Special Delivery services; some countries have never even instituted such service and others have got along without the need for special stamps.

The Austro-Egyptian Postal Treaty of 1868 provided for a reciprocal express service, but I doubt that it was actually instituted; the proposed fee was 3pi. or 30 soldi.

Egypt inaugurated Express service (Fig. 1) on September 12th 1922¹, but it was not

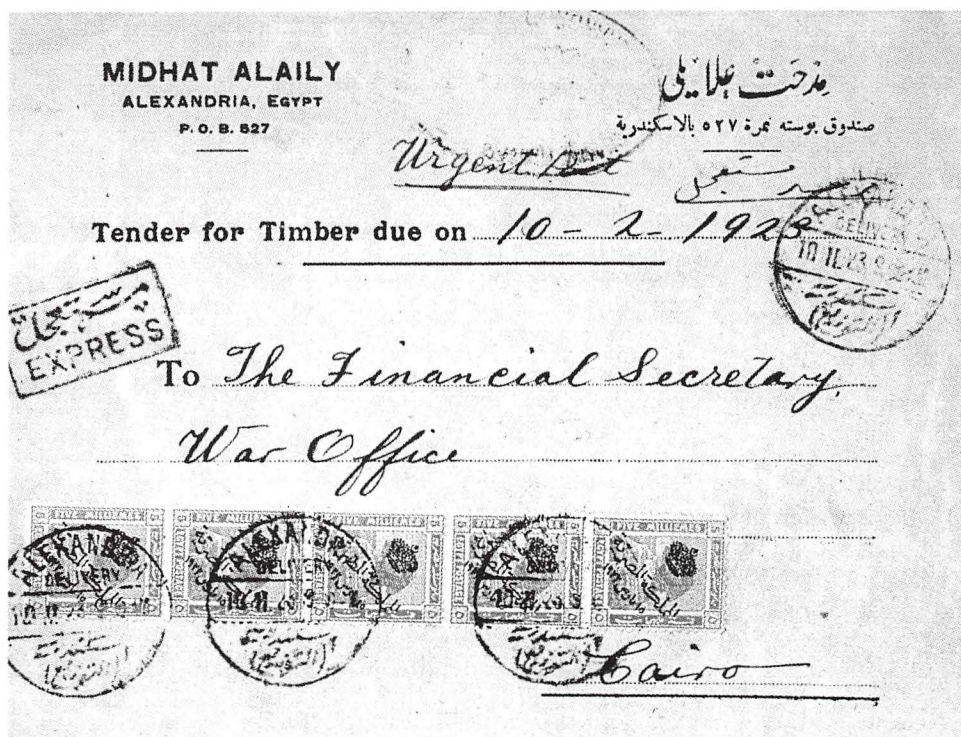


Fig. 1. An early (1923) Express cover (courtesy of C.H. Hass).

until four years later that a special stamp for it was issued. There was obviously not a pressing need, but two advantages can be imagined for such a stamp: it could aid in identifying Express letters and its special appearance could help publicize the service.

The meaning of "express" or "special delivery" can be rather different from one country to another. In the United States it has meant only expedited delivery from the post office of destination to the addressee's premises; there was no difference in travel or handling before reaching the office of delivery. For this reason, the term "special delivery" is appropriate. The more recently introduced Express Mail Service (EMS) is quite different: it involves accelerated handling and transport, and a special pick-up system, with special boxes for depositing it. The Egyptian Express service was more like the latter.

The Express service in Egypt was at first limited to the major cities, but it was gradually expanded to include all main offices and especially the important suburbs such as Ramleh (Alexandria) and Heliopolis (Cairo)². Special boxes were set up; they were painted green to distinguish them clearly from the ordinary red letter boxes. In the 1930s these boxes were cleared six times a day (three times on Sundays and holidays). A special bilingual *musta'agil* / EXPRESS handstamp was provided to identify Express letters. A label, black on red (later, pink), was required for international Express letters, but was not generally used on internal letters unless the Express fee was paid by ordinary stamps (enforcement appears to have been lax, however). It was inscribed EXPRES only, without Arabic (Fig. 2). Later, bilingual labels were introduced (see Chapter XXXIX)

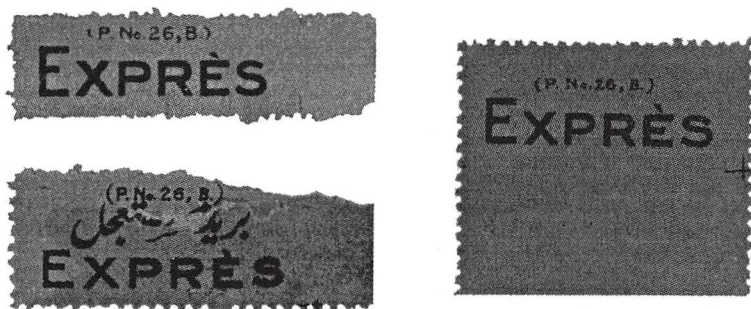


Fig. 2 The red EXPRES labels.

The possibility of sending Express letters to other countries was announced³ with effect from January 1st 1932. Since Express service was not covered by UPU protocols, reciprocal agreements had to be reached with each participating country and the range was therefore limited.

The Express fee for internal mail was initially 15m. in addition to the ordinary letter postage of 5m. The Express fee was per letter, not per weight unit. Therefore, a letter weighing over 30g required a total of 25m., made up of 15m. fee plus 2x5m. postage. Foreign Express mail carried a fee of 40m. When the first Express stamp was issued it had a denomination of 20m. and was thus sufficient to cover the total, inclusive charge for a single-weight letter. Two of them could be used to pay the foreign Express fee, but foreign postage then had to be added as well.

Stamps

The first Express stamp of Egypt (Fig. 3) has a special significance, for it shares with the 1926 27m. violet Air Mail stamp the distinction of being the first photogravure stamps to be printed in Egypt. It was evidently conceived early in 1925 and what appear to be the earliest essays are denominated 15m. instead of the 20m. as issued. They are skilfully hand-drawn and each includes a portrait of King Fuad cut from the contemporary 5m. ordinary stamp. Another 15m. essay, drawn in blue, omits the King's portrait and depicts the interior of a garage with a messenger walking up to a pair of motorcycles (Fig. 4). These must have been rejected at an early stage, for in April it is reported⁴ that two different "sketches in colour" were prepared by the Survey Department of Egypt. One "featured a motor-cycle messenger as suggested by the Postmaster General, and the other, an allegorical figure of Mercury, the legendary messenger of the Gods". I have not seen either of these, or even illustrations of them, and they were not in the Palace Collections.



Fig. 3 The 20m. green Express stamp with control number, and one with a plate flaw, in which the right-most *alef* extends into the white border above.

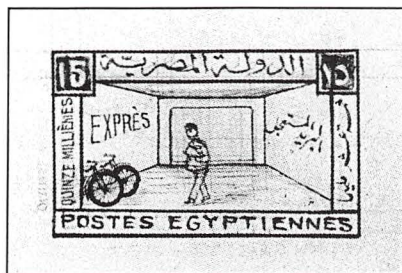


Fig. 4 Essays in blue and red for the first Express stamp: the frames and much of the inscription are in each case blue (the portraits are cut-outs from the ordinary 5m. and the boxed EXPRES on the two portrait designs is brown-red), and one without portrait, and in blue.

The motorcycle messenger design was approved and a formal drawing was prepared, photographed, and reduced to stamp size for final approval. The working drawing was four times the final stamp size. The frame part was drawn in black and the inscriptions were then drawn on the black panels in opaque white. The vignette was executed with an air-brush and was integral with the frame. The design showed a motorcycle courier racing across the desert with the palms of an oasis in the background. Curiously, no dispatch bag is shown. The courier wears a fez, safety helmets being unknown in those days.

The motorcycle is difficult to identify, because the image is fairly fuzzy at best, but it appears to be a single-cylinder machine with a belt drive (no rear sprocket is visible). The courier is by no means fanciful, however, as shown by Figure 5, a photograph of an actual contemporary courier.

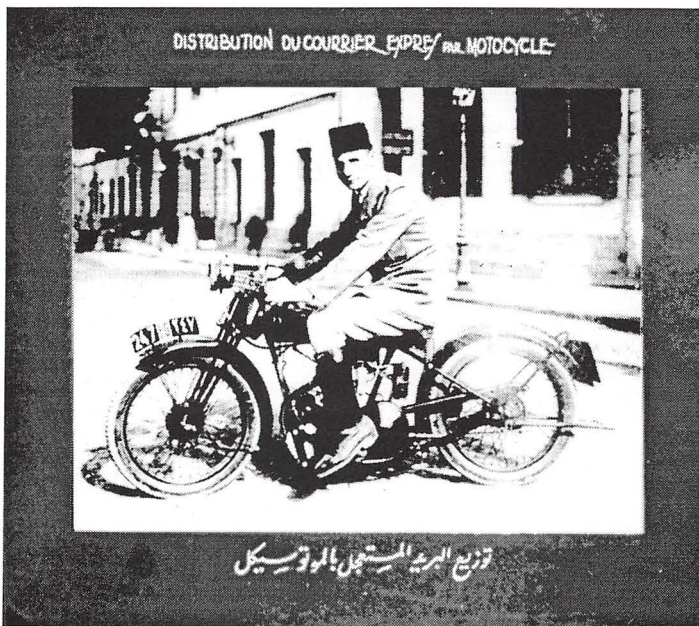


Fig. 5 A motorcycle courier of the 1920s.

A master negative was made by photographing the working drawing and from it, in the normal procedure, a photogravure plate or cylinder was prepared. The stamp was printed in a dark, dull green, perforated 13x13½, on paper watermarked with multiple crown and Arabic F (*fe'*), in sheets of 50. A control number, A/25, was part of the printing surface and appears on the corner margin. It indicates the year in which the plate went to press. Most other Egyptian stamps of the period were printed as two panes (of 50 or 100), each having the same control number, engraved separately. The Express stamp, however, appears to have been printed one pane (sheet) at a time, for no variation of the control number has been reported. There are variations of the impression, which is never sharp and clear. Presumably the differences in impression arose from variations in the inking and wiping during the printing (had there been two printings, a second control number, B/25, would be expected).

A so-called "royal proof"⁵ imperforate on thin card was prepared as a single sheet of

50, printed in brown, and, most curiously, bearing no control number. This sheet was sold in the auction of the Palace Collections and has since been broken up. It is the only one of the many royal imperforate proofs to have been prepared in a color different from that used for the issued stamps. Otherwise it resembles other proofs in being imprinted with CANCELLED on the back.

The quantity issued is stated⁴ to be 204,750, delivered on February 11th 1926. However, the earliest date I have knowledge of is November 26th and the Gibbons and the Zeheri catalogs both give November 28th as the date.

Plate flaws exist, but the poor resolution of the printing tends to obscure them. Two that have been noted^{2,6} are a white spot in the U and a white spot before the R of ROYAUME (see also Fig. 3). On some stamps the photogravure screen making the background extends into the space between the stamps, giving the paper an overall pale green tint.

Late in 1927 the Postmaster General decided to have the Express stamps printed in two colors, in the same design and denomination as before. To accomplish this task the Survey Department abandoned photogravure in favor of offset lithography. Since the shaded tones of the inscription panels could not be reproduced by simple offset lithography, a new working drawing was prepared from a ferro-prussiate print of the original working drawing in order to produce a plate for the frame portion. The shaded background to the inscriptions was replaced by thin horizontal lines. At the same time the Arabic lettering was changed to a bolder style (Fig. 6). A master negative was made of the new working drawing and was used in the usual manner, after reduction to stamp size, to produce a lithographic plate by means of a step-and-repeat camera.

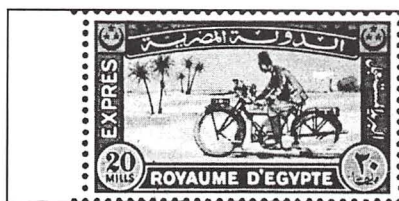


Fig. 6 Redrawn design of 1929 (these show flaws in the sky above the rider).

The vignette portion was handled differently as the effect of shading was an important feature of the design. A half-tone screen was used in production of the plate; the tiny dots that resulted are easy to discern on the printed stamps. The overall process was the same as that used to prepare the contemporary Cotton Congress commemorative set.

The dimensions of the new stamps were greater in each direction by 1mm. The printed sheets apparently consisted of two panes of 50, unlike the first Express stamp. The control numbers, the same for each pane, were hand-inscribed on the frame plate and thus differ slightly in form and position. The panes were cut apart before delivery to the Postal Administration; gutter pairs are not known.

Color trials were submitted to the Postmaster General in March 1928. The only color trial that I have knowledge of is in dark green and black, printed in a sheet of 15, imperforate, on watermarked paper, without marginal markings. The colors chosen were brick red and grey. The red shows surprisingly little variation, but the vignette ranges from black to grey. Plate flaws exist in both the frame and the vignette (Fig. 6), but most are small (see Phillips² and Houston⁶).

The second Express stamp is recorded in various catalogs as having been issued in

September 1929 although supplies were delivered by the printers a year earlier. Perhaps there was still an ample supply of the first Express stamp on hand. The second stamp remained in use for fourteen years during which time it went through seven printings. The control numbers and the quantities printed^{4,7} are shown in the table below.

PRINTINGS OF THE SECOND EXPRESS STAMP		
Control No.	Quantity	Dispatched
A/28	60,000	27 NO 28
A/30	140,000	28 AP 30
A/31	62,500	18 JN 31
A/32	130,000	1 AU 32
A/36	210,000	9 AP 36
A/39	55,000	8 AP 39
A/40	57,500	2 OC 40
Total	725,000	



Fig. 7 Proof with skewed perforations

One pane of 50 of each control number was printed as a royal imperforate proof (CANCELLED on the back). Another kind of proof was prepared on normal watermarked paper but with obliquely skewed perforations⁸ (Fig. 7), one pane for each control number.

Until 1932 this and the previous 20m. Express stamp were almost invariably used by themselves (Fig. 8) unless the letters required additional postage for registration or for being overweight. The green stamp appears not to have been rendered obsolete by the bicolored one and the two were used concurrently, presumably until supplies of the green stamp were used up. During the long life of this issue some changes in regulation occurred. An initial restriction against buying more than 25 copies was removed in 1930. From August 1st 1938 the Express fee was allowed to be paid with Air Mail stamps. Express service for international parcels became possible to some countries in November 1931; the fee was 40m.⁹

Eventually an increase in the Express fee from 15m. to 20m. became necessary. Although Phillips² stated a date of April 1932, he must have confused the date with the much later increase in the basic postage rate (to 6m.). Covers showing the 15m. fee (i.e., 20m. total) have been seen as late as 1938 and presumably that fee remained in force until mid-1940. Covers showing an apparent 20m. fee before this date were presumably of double weight (15m. fee + 2x5m. postage = 25m.). It has been stated¹⁰ that July 11th 1940, the date when simple postage was increased to 6m., was the date of the increase in the Express fee as well.

Three essays exist, drawn in black ink on card, denominated 25m. (Fig. 9). They depict a somewhat more modern motorcycle, having a chain drive, but lacking a headlight. The Arabic word *bareed* (posts) was added to the top of the design. These essays are not dated, but circumstances suggest 1940 or 1941 since the last printing of the 20m. had control number A/40. Events overtook these preparations and no 25m.

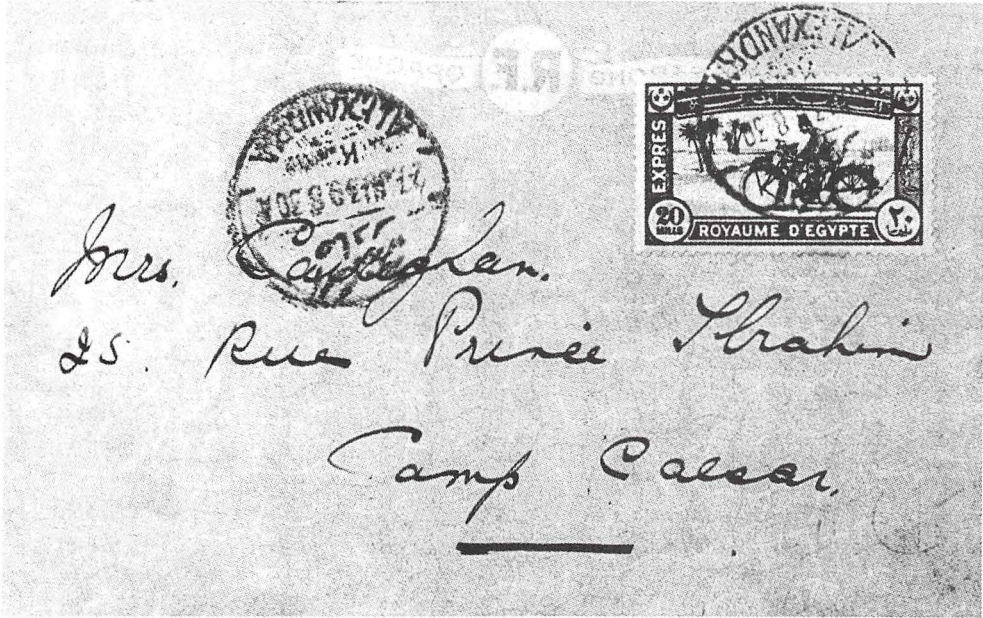


Fig. 8 A single 20m. Express stamp paying the combined 15m. fee and 5m. postage.

Express stamp was issued. When the simple letter rate was raised to 6m. on July 11th 1940 an Express stamp denominated 26m. rather than 25m. was needed. However, the need was not really urgent, for the new rate for an Express letter could be made up conveniently using the old 20m. augmented by stamps for the simple postage component. Shortly afterwards (August 15th) the international Express fee was also raised; it became 50m. (plus 22m. simple postage).

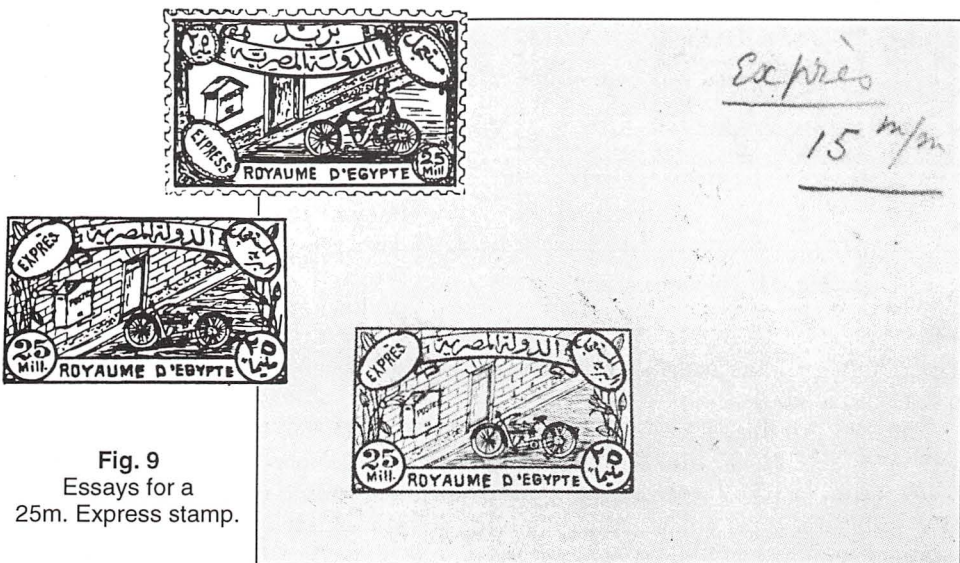


Fig. 9
Essays for a
25m. Express stamp.

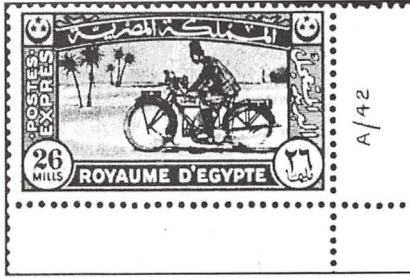


Fig. 10 The revised design of 1943.

overlaps the frame at right and left. The one and only printing amounted to 132,500 stamps. The date of issue is stated¹¹ to be February 23rd 1943, but the Gibbons and Zeheri catalogs give March 1943 instead (although the proofs had been approved in March of the previous year). The usual pane of 50 imperforate proofs on thin card was prepared along with a pane with oblique perforations. There are many plate flaws, mostly quite small^{2,6}.

The 26m. Express stamp had a life of little over a year because on July 13th 1943 the fee was raised to 30m. and the ordinary postage rate was raised to 10m.¹¹ A new Express stamp denominated 40m. was required and went to press immediately. The new stamp, brown and "grey", is listed in the Gibbons and Zeheri catalogs as having been issued in November 1944. Jean Boulad¹² gives a more precise date, November 18th (it was made available at the Abdine Palace four days earlier). However, a use on cover dated February 29th has been reported and the recorded dates may have suffered from a typographical error for an actual date in 1943.

Two control numbers, A/43 and A/46, each of which exists in two variations, are listed in the Zeheri catalog. Lee⁵ lists a control A/51; however, I have not been able to confirm its existence. The catalog of the sale of the Palace Collections lists only two sheets, one with control A/43, the other unspecified. Each was accompanied by the usual pane of 50 royal



Fig. 11 The original and redrawn control numbers A/46.

imperforate proofs, making a total of 100, but Lee lists 300; the latter figure is presumably an error. The 40m. was also prepared with oblique perforations (two panes of 50). There is a curious feature concerning the A/46 control number. It appears to have been inscribed A/45 at first, but the 5 was altered to 6 by closing the bottom loop, perhaps because printing did not get under way as soon as had been expected. Part way through the printing the cobbled 6 was erased and a properly drawn 6 was inscribed in its

place (the A/ part was unchanged, down to the minutest detail) (Fig. 11). Both versions seem to be readily available.

The two printings were unusually large: A/43 - 343,750, dispatched October 23rd 1943; A/46 - 2,222,500, dispatched September 8th to December 16th 1946.

The stamp was hurriedly prepared under wartime conditions and it is surprising that there were so few plate flaws, although some are moderately prominent^{2,6,13}. Flaws in the sky, resembling a flying object, and spots in the frame (Fig. 12), one appearing like an

A 26m. Express stamp went to press two years later with control number A/42. Although the colors and the basic design were unchanged, the new frame was slightly smaller and the inscription panels were altered (Fig. 10). The Arabic at the top read *al-dawlat al-masriya* (The State of Egypt) on the previous stamp; it was replaced by *al-mamlakat al-masriya* (The Kingdom of Egypt) on the new stamp and the words *POSTES* and *bareed* were added to the side panels. The additions slightly constricted the space for the vignette which

extra star in the triple-star-and-crescent motif, are examples. The color of the brown frame varies somewhat, but the color of the vignette shows a wide range, from black to light grey or blue-grey (A/43) or bluish grey to light grey-blue (A/46). Since there are more shades than printings, differential settling of the pigments in the ink during the printing process, or poor quality control in the

preparation of the ink for each work shift, may have been responsible. The extremes, black and grey-blue, are totally different colors and would qualify for catalog status by any criterion (Fig. 13). However, the range of intermediate shades complicates the situation and there is little difference in scarcity among the colors.



Fig. 12
Flaws on the 40m.:
upper right corner of
top panel.



Fig. 13 Extremes in the shades of the vignettes.

A variety imperforate is listed in the Zeheri catalog, but I have not seen an example. The listing may have been based on lot no. 926 in the Palace Collections sale, described as "40m. black and brown, imperf. proof mounted on card".

On May 6th 1945 (King Farouk's birthday) a new feature was added to the internal Express service; Express letters were flown between Alexandria and Cairo for no extra fee¹⁵. This was the first regular internal air mail service, apart from the internal leg of Imperial Airways flights between London and South Africa (the air mail stamps that were issued earlier were intended for international air mail). There were three flights a day and it was claimed that the time from posting to delivery could be as short as 2½ hours if the letter was posted at the last minute. The service was by Misr Airlines whose circular cachet was applied to letters mailed on the first day. Less than a year later (February 11th 1946) Express letters were also flown between Cairo and Port Said, Minieh, Assiout, and Luxor. The Express stamp began to be used freely (at appropriate charges) for international air mail as well (Fig. 15).

The last of the Express stamps was issued on January 16th 1952, when all current Egyptian stamps were given an overprint in Arabic reading "King of Egypt and Sudan". Color trials were prepared in five colors¹⁶, each in a sheet of 50: black, blue, red, green, and brown. Black was chosen for the issued stamps (Fig. 14). No varieties have been reported except for an observation of a variation in paper thickness¹⁷.



Fig. 14 The 40m. overprinted "King of Egypt and Sudan".

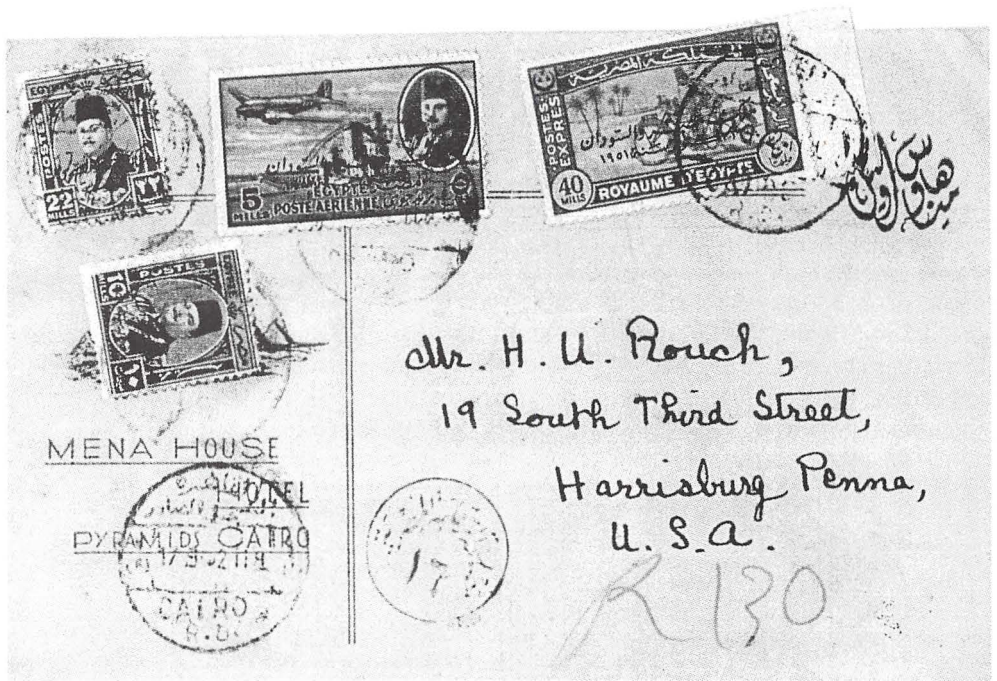


Fig. 15 Use of the 40m. Express stamp to pay air mail postage on a non-express letter.

No additional printings (as indicated by control numbers) were made of the 40m., although the Express fee remained the same until 1967. Presumably this stamp continued in use until stocks were used up and was then abandoned after the formation of the Republic of Egypt as a result of the revolution later in 1952. Although the Express stamp did not bear the portrait of the King, it carried the symbol of the monarchy in the form of the watermark (crown and Arabic F). Furthermore, the courier wore a fez. This was strongly disapproved of by the Republic as a symbol of the old regime.

The watermark used on all of the Express stamps as well as the contemporary ordinary stamps shows two substantial flaws, evidently resulting from damage to the dandy-roll¹⁸. On one the long stroke of the Arabic letter *fe'* is missing and on the other it is bent sharply upwards (Fig. 16). These varieties have been seen on 20m. Express stamps and they probably occur on all issues. However, it is not possible to specify a sheet position because the dimensions of the dandy-roll were not the same as the panes of the Express stamps and the position of the flaws therefore varies.



Fig. 16 The normal and damaged watermark bits.

continued with increasing fees. In 1967 the fee was still 30m., but simple postage was raised to 20m., making a total of 50m. for an Express letter. In 1985 the postage component rose to 50m. and in 1988 the Express fee rose to 150m., making a total of 200m. In November 1989 the Express fee took an enormous jump, reaching 350m. and simple postage became 100m. (10pi).

Express Mail Service (EMS)

At an uncertain date, perhaps about 1990, the new International Express Mail Service (EMS) was instituted. It soon became amalgamated with the internal Express mail in Egypt as well. Instead of stamps, enormous EMS labels, having a characteristic border of diagonal orange and blue stripes, were used. Postage was paid in cash, the amount being scrawled on the label (Fig. 17). Recently (1997?) a smaller self-adhesive label, die-cut to 8 x 4.7cm. bar-coded, inscribed *EMS EGYPT* (blue) and the office name (e.g. "office: EL ABBASIA" in black), with geometrical part-border in red at top, was introduced. The international fee in 1990, according to Lonely Planet's guidebook, *Egypt and Sudan*, 2nd edition, was £E20 up to 100g to Europe and North America, then £E22 for an additional half kilogram and £E7 for each following half kilogram. By 1990 it reached £E28. Insofar as I know, the internal fee was 175pi. in 1995; it was raised in 1996. This is now the only Express service available.



Fig. 17 An internal EMS cover of 1990.

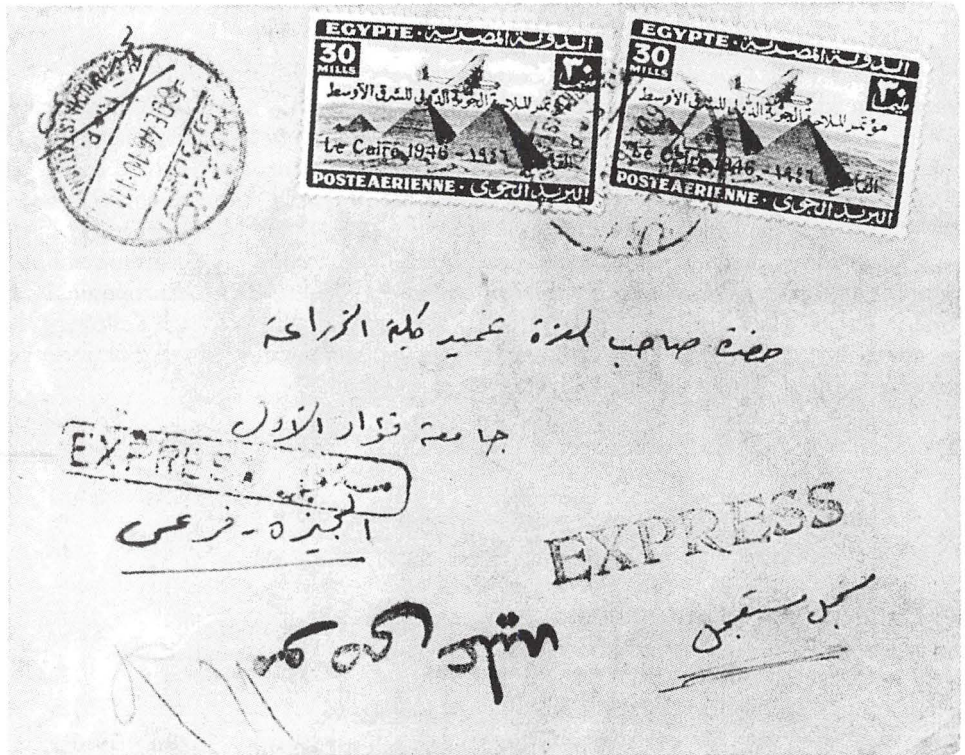
Postmarks

The special cachet inscribed *musta'agil* / EXPRESS (Fig. 19) dating from 1923 has already been mentioned; this exists in different sizes (I have not seen a French version, *EXPRES*). In later years at least two other types of cachet were introduced; one has no frame and is considerably larger (35mm wide) than the first type and the other has the English and Arabic all in one line within a frame 48mm long.

A circular date-stamp inscribed *EXPRES* has been seen for Alexandria (Fig. 18). In the 1950s, the Arabic for "Express" was changed to *mukhsoos* ("special"), and for Cairo, at least, a circular date-stamp having the word *SPECIAL* in the bottom panel came into



Fig. 18
EXPRES date-stamp for
Alexandria Station.



مستجمل
EXPRESS



Fig. 19 Handstamped cachets for Express letters.

use. The only other types of postmark associated with the Express service are those inscribed POSTMEN or FACTEURS as part of a circular date-stamp (Fig. 20). Such postmarks are known for Alexandria, Cairo, and Port Said (the latter is rare)²⁰. They were not generally used to cancel stamps, but were applied as backstamps, presumably to indicate personal handling by a carrier at the delivery end. These postmarks were not intended specifically for Express letters, however, and they were used on Acknowledgment of Receipt letters, officially sealed (repaired) letters, etc. Date-stamps inscribed DELIVERY were also sometimes used as backstamps on Express letters.

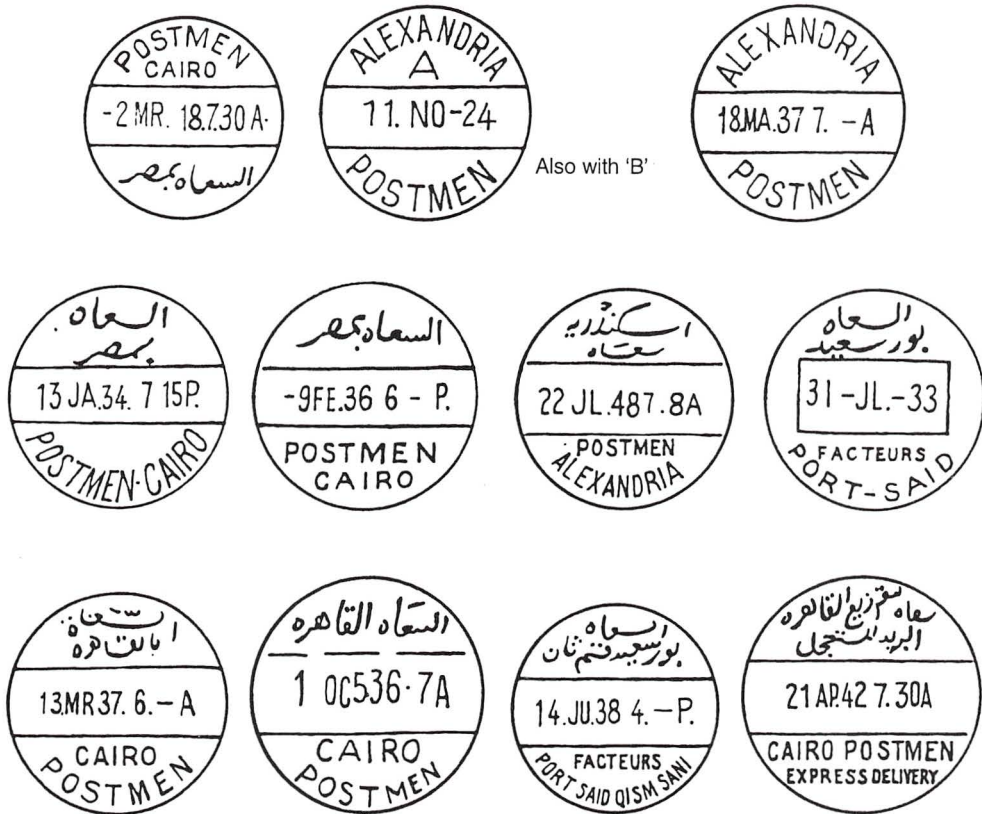


Fig. 20 POSTMEN handstamps.

References²¹

1. *L'OP* No. 11, 9 (Jan. 1932).
2. L. Phillips, *QC IV*, 50-2 (whole no. 40, July 1953).
3. *L'OP* No. 11, 26 (Jan. 1932).
4. *The Production of Egyptian Postage Stamps*, an unpublished, anonymous manuscript written in 1947 by "a senior official" of the Survey Department of Egypt.
5. G.L. Lee, *Egypt. Royal Imperforate Printings*, self-published, Bernardsville, NJ, 1959.
6. G.T. Houston, *QC IV*, 76-82 (whole no. 42, June 1954).
7. *L'OP* No. 52, 358 (Oct. 1945).
8. J. Boulad d'Humières, *SBZ* 1964 (June) 237-43.
9. *L'OP* No. 11, 29 (Jan. 1932).
10. J. Boulad d'Humières, *L'OP* No. 47, 108 (Jan. 1941).
11. J. Boulad d'Humières, *L'OP* No. 48, 148 (Oct. 1944).
12. J. Boulad d'Humières, *L'OP* No. 49, 160 (Jan. 1945).
13. Mrs. H. Fresco, *L'OP* No. 77, 306 (Jan. 1952).

14. R. Tipper, *ET* 1, 76 (July/Aug. 1969).
15. J. Boulad d'Humières, *L'OP* No. 51, 281 (July 1945).
16. P.A.S. Smith, *L'OP* No. 124, 3-5 (Jan./Apr. 1971).
17. G. Boulad, *L'OP* No. 114, 433-4 (Oct. 1964/Jan. 1965).
18. G.T. Houston, *ET* 4 (5), 82 (July/Aug. 1972).
19. J. Sears, *QC XIII* (7 and 9), 137-9 (Sep. 1988), 181-2 (whole nos. 147 and 149, Sep. 1988 and Mar. 1989).
20. G. Boulad, *L'OP* No. 40, 458-9 (Mar. 1939), no. 88, 465-8 (Oct. 1954); M. Murphy, *QC XII* (11/12), 252-7 (whole no. 139/140, Sep./Dec. 1986).
21. This Chapter is a revised version of an article by the author in *The Congress Book 1994*, American Philatelic Congress, Pittsburgh, PA, 1994. pp. 31-46.